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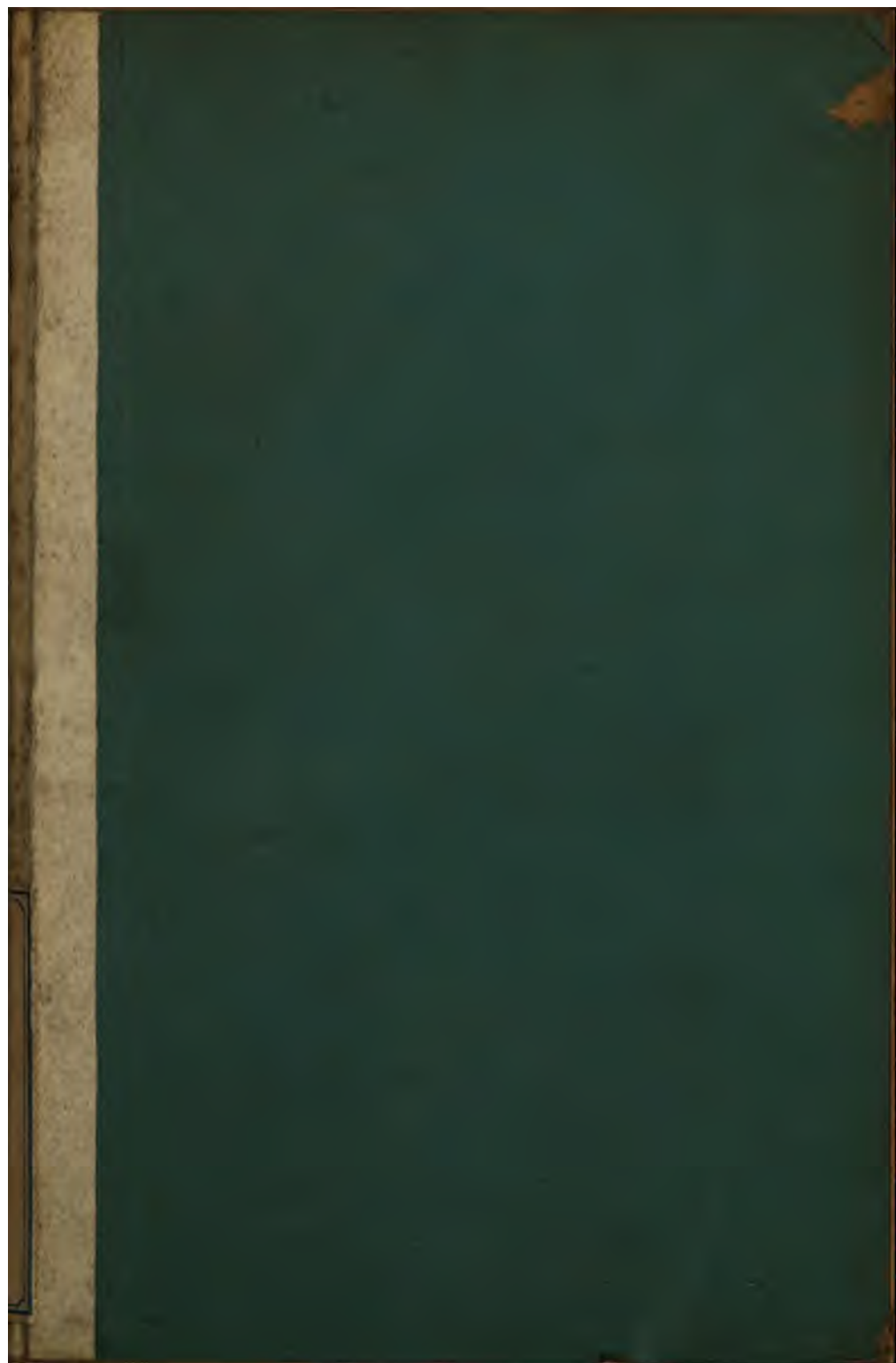
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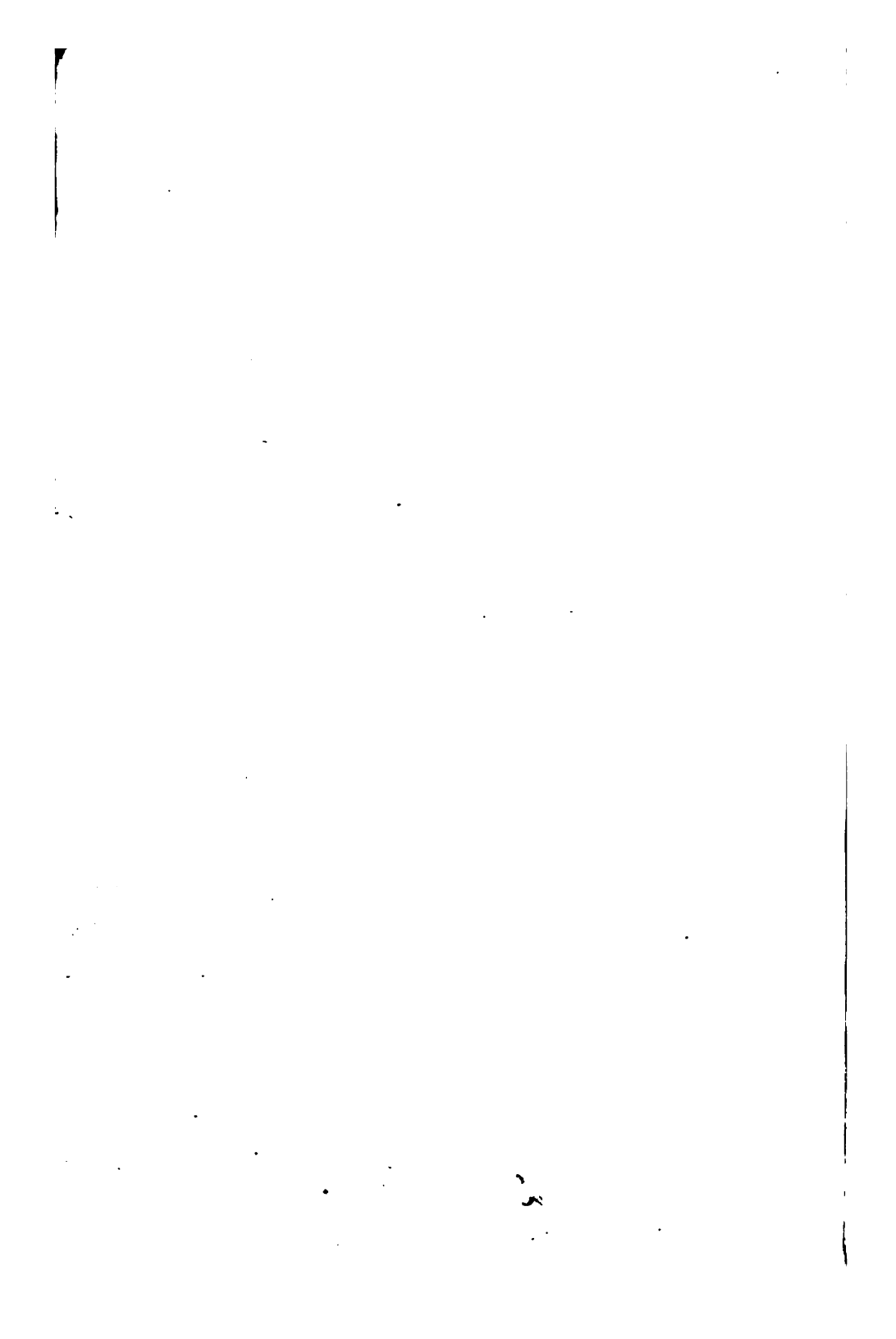
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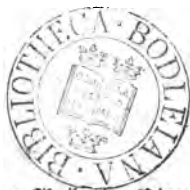
The Death of Christ was a Propitiatory
Sacrifice and a Vicarious Atonement
for the Sins of Mankind.

A
THEOLOGICAL ESSAY

READ
IN THE DIVINITY SCHOOL, OXFORD,
JUNE 25, 1835.

BY
JOHN COWLEY FISHER, B.A.
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PREFATORY NOTE.

THE following Essay, intended for private circulation only, has been reprinted in the exact form in which it was originally read in the Divinity School at Oxford. It is, perhaps, too obvious to need remark, that the handling of the subject of which it treats, necessarily imperfect even at the time when it was written, owing to the limits then prescribed to the length of all University Prize compositions at Oxford, must be much more inadequate and imperfect now, when the literature connected with this question has become so much more extensive and voluminous. The utmost, therefore, that the writer can hope for by the reproduction of this Essay at the present time is, that the attention of those few friends who may deem it worthy of perusal may be recalled, once more, to the earnest and prayerful study of a subject, which must ever be one of profound interest to the enlightened Christian student—a subject which has been said, with truth, to constitute “the *real centre* of the theological system;” and which was certainly regarded as one of special importance for the time, by the two chief expounders of scientific Theology at Oxford, at the period above referred to.

Oxford, August 31, 1877.

The Death of Christ was a Propitiatory Sacrifice and a Vicarious Atonement for the Sins of Mankind.

IT is the remark of a distinguished philosopher, when speaking of the mode in which knowledge may be most readily acquired and most usefully applied, that "it would be very convenient, in the several parts that are to be known and studied, to consider what proofs the matter in hand is capable of, and not to expect other kinds of evidence than the nature of the thing will bear^a." To the neglect of this salutary caution must be attributed the fact, that so many enquirers after truth have been unsuccessful in their pursuit, and been doomed to live the victims of a hopeless scepticism. The remark applies with peculiar force to the revealed plan of human redemption by the Atonement of Christ, against which the charge of obscurity has so often been brought. But such obscurity, whatever difficulty it may occasion in obtaining a just knowledge of this doctrine as an article of the Christian's faith, detracts nothing from its credibility as a revelation from God. A degree of mystery is implied in the very term Revelation, which, if it is to be limited by the powers of human reason, must exclude those very subjects for which, reason being

^a Locke's Essay on Study. See Life by Lord King, vol. i. p. 198.

insufficient, revelation is required: and such is peculiarly the character of the doctrine in question, which necessarily involves so much of the incomprehensible nature of the Deity. Arranged by the contrivance of infinite Wisdom, and executed by the energy of Omnipotence, Redemption could not have been that stupendous transaction which glorified God while it conferred salvation on the sinner, had the inspired account brought it within the narrow compass of human understanding. The unbeliever, then, will do well to pause ere he reject altogether a scheme, which professes to have the Almighty for its author, and the eternal happiness of man for its object, merely because he cannot trace with logical precision the connection between the Cross of Christ and the salvation of the soul.

This view is confirmed by the analogy of nature; for, had the statements of Scripture concerning the plan of man's redemption been so simple as to preclude the necessity of diligent enquiry, this would have been contrary to all the notions we have derived from experience of God's usual course of dealing with His creatures. The path of human life is surrounded with difficulty, and the understanding as well as the heart is liable to the temptations of error. In moral philosophy and natural religion, no less than in the doctrines of Revelation, are many things hard to be comprehended; and the reason plainly is, that the discipline of the understanding and of faith, by perplexity and doubt, was intended to form an important part of our probation in this world.

The same reasoning, from analogy, furnishes a satisfactory reply to *all* the objections which have been urged against the doctrine of vicarious Atonement by Christ; inasmuch as they will apply with equal force to the acknowledged course of God's government in the world, and to every system of natural religion. If a dispensation of Providence, which professes to relate to us as beings destined for another world, be analogous to that which relates to us merely as inhabitants of the present, and if the principle of both appear to be the same, we may conclude that both proceed from one and the same Author; and, if the parts objected to in the former be similar to what is actually experienced under the latter, the objections, being inconclusive in one case because contradicted by fact, must be inconclusive also in the other^b.

Now it appears that, in the natural world, the Almighty works not by mere independent acts of sovereign authority, but by a connected system of comprehensive beneficence. The ultimate object of every dispensation of His Providence, and the means whereby that object is effected, are mutually dependent upon each other; and the combination of both is essential to the perfection of the whole plan. The continuation of the human species might have been effected without the intervention of human agency: but God has rather chosen to accomplish it by means which operate most extensively for the benefit of society, call forth the best feelings of the heart, and thus give a value other-

^b See Butler's Analogy, part ii. chap. 8.

wise unknown to the blessing of existence. Now the very same wisdom, and perfection of design, is manifested in the remedy provided for sin by the vicarious Atonement of the Divine Mediator. Had the gift of salvation been bestowed upon mankind, merely by proclaiming at once a full pardon to all upon repentance; the benefit conferred by such an unconditional remission of guilt, though undoubtedly great, would have fallen far short of that which is now provided. It is the *disease* of sin which constitutes its chief punishment. Pardon, while this disease remained, would have been little better than a name; and mercy therefore, to be complete and effectual, must be communicated in such a way as to heal the disease, as well as to remove its painful consequences. This is just what the scheme of the Atonement is calculated to effect. God Himself, in human nature, suffers the penalty due to guilt at the same time that He declares its forgiveness; and, by so doing, exhibits the intrinsic evil of sin in such a light, as must lead to the abhorrence of it; and also presents such a lovely view of His own character, as to make it the most inviting object both of imitation and of gratitude. Thus the *same* doctrine which speaks peace to the conscience produces likewise the deepest penitence, and furnishes the most powerful incentive and the purest motive to a holy obedience: so that not only is man's title to heaven restored, but it is restored in that very way which is best adapted to give him the full capacity of enjoying it, by implanting in his breast the moral likeness of his

Creator and Redeemer. What, then, becomes of those unphilosophical objections to this doctrine, which are founded upon a mistaken view of the Divine immutability? The Deist affirms, that it either is agreeable to the will of God to grant salvation on repentance, and then He *will* grant it without a mediator; or it is not agreeable to His will, and then a mediator can be of no avail, unless we admit the mutability of Divine decrees^c. But the conclusion supposed to be involved in this alternative is by no means necessary. The fallacy arises from supposing, that the Divine decrees must in all cases be absolute: in other words, that God ordains an end, without regard to the means whereby it is to be accomplished. But this is not the case in the economy of the natural world; and it would be inconsistent with that harmony which characterises all the operations of unerring wisdom, that it should be so in any of its dispensations.

It has also been imagined, that repentance for the past, and amendment for the future, are of themselves sufficient to avert the penalty of sin, and restore us to the Divine favour. Experience, however, proves that such is not the fact as far as regards the present life, in which the consequences of transgression frequently continue long after the cause itself has been withdrawn. Repentance the most sincere, and resolutions of amendment the most determined, will not restore to the drunkard or the sensualist the health, reputation, or fortune

^c See Magee on the Scripture Doctrines of Atonement and Sacrifice, vol. i. p. 10.

he has lost. Some provision, it is true, has been made in nature for mitigating the sufferings consequent upon criminal indulgence : but this provision partakes of the same vicarious character as that here objected to in the Atonement of Christ ; for the recovery of the offender is generally effected less by his own exertions, than by the friendly labour of others in his behalf, and not unfrequently by their actual participation in his sufferings.

But not only is the plan of the Atonement consistent with what we actually experience of the arrangements of God's providence in this life, but it seems moreover indispensable to the vindication of His justice as the moral Governor of the world. It is true, indeed, that God cannot be either injured or benefited *personally* by the conduct of His creatures. But, in His capacity as Supreme Governor, He is bound to enforce the strict observance of His laws ; because the well-being of His whole creation depends upon the obedience of each individual to the constituted order of things. Unless, therefore, we can suppose that, in order to spare a guilty criminal, He would relinquish the protection of His faithful and obedient subjects, the penalty of sin must be undergone and the demands of justice satisfied. Now such a satisfaction cannot be made by repentance and amendment alone. If obedience be a duty at all, it must be so at all times : consequently, there can be no superabundance of merit in the holiness of one portion of life, to atone for the faults of another. And as to the merit of repentance, the conscience of the penitent himself may be

considered as affording a fair view of the case; for, however sincerely he may have reformed, he still looks upon himself with disapprobation, and this feeling increases as his reformation advances. Since, therefore, the greater the progress he makes in virtue, the nearer must be his approach to the knowledge of the truth; it follows, that this disapprobation of himself, increasing with his improvement, is agreeable to truth, and that the God of truth views him in the same light, and consequently cannot hold him entitled to pardon on the mere merit of his repentance^d.

If then it appear, that the infinite holiness and justice of God demand some more efficacious atonement than mere repentance and reformation, it seems to follow, that nothing can render it consistent with His glory to bestow pardon, which does not exhibit those attributes in the same full and clear light as if the threatened vengeance had in all its rigour been executed upon the sinner. Now, such a requirement is exactly provided for by the vicarious sacrifice of Christ; for, being equal with God, He was able, by bearing the full penalty due to sin, to satisfy the utmost demands of justice; and, by fulfilling in our nature all the injunctions of the law, to vindicate the honour of God's holiness.

It has been urged, that this strict exaction of the penalty of sin represents God in an unfavourable light, as an implacable and relentless being. This mistake, however, arises from erroneously consider-

^d See Balguy's Essay on Redemption, pp. 31—55, where this point is fully and clearly argued.

ing the death of Christ as the *procuring cause* of God's good-will to man, rather than as the *means* appointed for restoring him to favour consistently with the honour of His justice. Love for our fallen race existed before, and this was only the medium of expressing it. The clemency of forgiveness was also exercised, notwithstanding all the punishment due to sin was borne by the substitute; for, be it remembered that this was the case of a crime committed, and not of a mere debt contracted, the satisfaction of which by a surety makes its forgiveness an act of justice.

It has also been objected with equal presumption, that, if God thus visits the punishment due to sin upon the holy Saviour, He must be indifferent whether the punishment falls upon the innocent or the guilty, and then what becomes of His justice? But, in the daily course of natural providence, it is appointed that the innocent shall participate in the punishment of the guilty: the sins of the parent are visited upon his offspring, and those of the prince upon his subjects; and the objection applies even more forcibly in these cases than in the former, inasmuch as the sufferings of Christ were purely voluntary*.

* Balguy, in the latter part of his Essay before referred to, contends, that the accomplishment of our redemption must be "premiat" only, and not "penal," the *reward* of our Saviour's *meritorious* obedience and death, but not the *purchase* of His *vicarious* Atonement, inasmuch as "demerit and punishment cannot be transferable, because they are personal." But this might be said with equal propriety of merit and reward. The truth is, that, though neither the *merit* of obedience, nor the *demerit* of sin, can be imparted to another, their

But the mysterious union of the Persons of the Godhead, which forms part of the Christian scheme, removes even the shadow of these objections. God not only decreed that Atonement should be made, but gave Himself as the sacrifice; and this identity of the Judge and the Victim dispels at once all idea of relentless rigour, or blind vindictiveness; and the character of God appears in all its loveliness. His attributes, which before shone so brightly in the works of creation and in the arrangements of providence, are here presented to our view in a new and still more glorious light—His love in undertaking, His wisdom and power in devising and executing the stupendous plan, by which *infinite* mercy and *infinite* justice might harmoniously meet together in the salvation of the sinner.

Let it not be said, that this our world is too insignificant a part of creation to be the object of such a manifestation of Divine power and goodness. Who shall limit the extent of His love and care, without whom not a sparrow falls to the ground, and whose perfections are manifested in the constitution of an insect or a flower, no less than in that of the most exalted of His creatures? Other worlds, moreover, *may* have rebelled, and therefore need the same Redeemer; and even those who have never sinned may be indebted to His Atonement for the constancy of their allegiance, and the permanency of their felicity. That

consequences, *reward* and *punishment*, may be so, and actually are so, as the experience of every day sufficiently proves. See Essay on Redemption, p. 66.

its beneficial effects may, indeed, extend to the utmost bounds of creation is more than probable, when we consider the wonderful *pregnancy* of those operations of the Deity which fall within the scope of our daily observation. The air, which is so necessary to the support of animal existence, is likewise made to contribute in various other ways to the perfect enjoyment of that existence. The same principle, which unites the particles of a grain of sand, also sustains the earth in its orbit, and probably guides the revolutions of the most distant stars. This comprehensive and widely-extended beneficence of design seems to pervade the entire economy of nature; and we have therefore sufficient grounds for presuming that it may extend over the whole field of providential dispensation, all the parts of which owe their design to the same Infinite wisdom, and their existence to the same Almighty power.

If then it has been satisfactorily shewn, that the doctrine in question is consistent with our own experience, and our truest notions of the wisdom, justice, and benevolence of the Supreme Being, the objections of the Deist fall to the ground, and the only question remaining for our consideration is its correspondence with Divine Revelation.

That the offerings of the Patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations were merely typical, and had reference to the more perfect sacrifice of Christ, might be inferred from the fact, that animal sacrifice ceased for the most part to be offered by believers as soon as the Christian dispensation was

introduced. Since, moreover, God expressed His approbation of this peculiar rite in the case of the patriarchs Abel, Noah, and Abraham, it is scarcely possible to avoid the conclusion that it was from the first ordained by *Him*. In those early ages, when frequent intercourse was maintained between earth and heaven, and when the Most High condescended to live, as it were, on terms of intimacy with His saints; it is incredible that He should have left them ignorant in the important article of worship, and equally so that He should have expressed His approbation of a rite which, without the sanction of Divine authority, would appear wanton and cruel. It is difficult also, upon any other hypothesis, to account for the universal prevalence of the same practice throughout the heathen world^f. It is, however, sufficient for our present purpose to shew, that both the sacrifices of the Patriarchs, and those of the Israelites under the Mosaic dispensation, had a direct reference to that of the Redeemer, and that God Himself approved of them in that character; and these points are fully established by the authority of Scripture.

“By faith,” it is said, “Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain^g:” and, in a former verse, faith is defined to be “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” But “things hoped for,” and “things not seen,” cannot be here spoken of as matters of

^f Some remarkable traces of the Divine institution of sacrifice are discoverable in the heathen corruptions of this rite. See Magee on Atonement, vol. i. pp. 379—395.

^g Heb. xi. 4.

mere unauthorised expectation : they must be subjects of Divine testimony. Accordingly, the faith of other saints, enumerated in the same chapter, is expressly said to be exercised in reliance upon some promise of God. Now the only promise on record, previous to the time of Abel, is that given to our first parents concerning the Messiah, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. This approval, therefore, of Abel's sacrifice, as a testimony of his faith, proves that its virtue consisted in being offered in reliance upon the promised sacrifice of Christ; and from the close connection between the rite and the promise, there is little room for doubt that the former was instituted at the same time that the latter was given, and by the same authority.

In the case of Job's three friends, animal offerings were *expressly* commanded; and from that exulting expression of his faith, "I know that *my Redeemer* liveth, and that He shall stand in the latter day upon the earth^h," it is clear that, whatever was the form of his worship, it would be conducted with reference to that Redeemer. The future advent of the Messiah appears to have been revealed both to Abraham and to Jacobⁱ; and it may therefore be presumed, that the same vital principle of faith in His Atonement constituted the efficacy of their oblations also, and of those of the patriarchs generally.

With respect to the sacrifices of the Levitical

^h Job xix. 25.

ⁱ Gen. xxii. 18, and xlix. 10.

Law, the Apostle tells us plainly that "the Law" itself had only "a *shadow of good things to come*^k"—that it "was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ"^l—and that all the fathers "drank of that spiritual Rock which followed them, and that Rock was Christ^m." The principal design, indeed, of the Epistle to the Hebrews seems to be, to shew that a connection, as between shadow and substance, existed between the Levitical priesthood and sacrifices, and the priesthood and sacrifice of Christ; and, by a parallel drawn between the two, to point out the infinite superiority of the latter. "If the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh; *how much more* shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your consciences from dead works to serve the living Godⁿ?" There was thus a correspondence in kind between the two, and a superiority in the latter only in quality.

We conclude, therefore, that sacrifice had its earliest origin in Divine appointment: that under the Law it was a continuation of the same rite as it existed under the Patriarchal dispensation, varied in form, and enforced by fresh sanctions: and that, in both cases, it was typical of the more effectual sacrifice of Christ. Hence, from the character of this rite, as set forth in the Old Testament, the real nature of the sacrifice of Christ

^k Heb. x. 1.

^l Gal. iii. 24.

^m 1 Cor. x. 4.

ⁿ Heb. ix. 13, 14.

may be fairly inferred ; for, when God teaches by an emblem or a type, He doubtless chooses such as is best adapted to impress upon the mind the principle of the antitype.

That, ever after the Fall, the depravity of man's nature was such as to need some atonement, no Christian can deny. That, under the Patriarchal dispensation generally, sacrifice was intended as an expiation for guilt, appears from the nature of the victim ; for it is difficult to suppose that the Creator would have sanctioned, much less ordained, the destruction of His creatures, except to denote some peculiarity in the ordinance essential to a right understanding of it. If, then, the ceremony be considered as expiatory, nothing could be more suitable than the offering of an *animal*, which exhibited the important lesson, that death was the wages of sin ; and, also, that deliverance from its consequences could only be procured by the vicarious death of the promised Redeemer. Hence the preference given to Abel's sacrifice : for, as a tribute of thanksgiving merely, or indeed in any other view than as an atonement for sin, Cain's offering of the fruits of his labour was more appropriate than the slaughter of an innocent animal. God, when afterwards reproving Cain for his discontent, says—" If thou doest not well, a *sin-offering*^o lieth at the door." The term *sin-offering* shews, evidently, that God looked upon the rite of sacrifice

^o Gen. iv. 7. This translation is adopted upon the authority of the best commentators ; see Magee on Atonement, vol. ii. pp. 235—250.

as an atonement for sin ; and the whole passage confirms the supposition, that it was originally appointed by *Him*.

The motive which induced Job to present burnt-offerings according to the number of his sons,—viz., lest they should “have sinned and cursed God in their hearts^p,” proves that they were offered by him, not only to propitiate the Divine favour, but also with the view of atoning for the guilt his sons might have previously contracted during their festive meetings. The same may be inferred still more decisively from the case of his three friends ; to *pacify* God’s displeasure against whom, burnt-offerings were presented under the express sanction of His authority. The sacrifices of Noah^q and Abraham were also of the same kind ; and the vicarious import of the institution is remarkably recognised in the case of Abraham substituting a ram in the *stead* of his son^r.

Under the Law the rite continued to be expiatory, with the addition of a more strictly *vicarious* signification, as appears from the ceremony on the great day of atonement ; which, being the most important, may be considered as determining the character of the entire institution. Upon this solemn occasion, the high-priest was required to offer a bullock and a goat, the one for himself and the other for the people. Having sprinkled the blood of these upon the mercy-seat, he was then to bring forth another goat, called the “scape-goat ;” and, having confessed over him the sins of the people,

^p Job i. 5.

^q See Gen. viii. 20, 21.

^r Gen. xxii. 13.

and put them upon his head, to send him away bearing this burden into the wilderness. No Israelite, viewing the connection, as pointed out in the succeeding chapter^a, between the blood of the animal and atonement for sin, could view this transaction in any other light than as an atonement for his own sins, by the transfer of them to one goat, and the substitution of the other's death for the punishment due to them. By the sprinkling of the blood upon the mercy-seat he would likewise understand, that the Divine mercy was thus vindicated from the imputation of injustice in pardoning the offender. With the type and the antitype, therefore, both before us, and the nature of their mutual connection clearly pointed out to us by the inspired Apostle in his Epistle to the Hebrews, we are bound to conclude with him, that "Christ" also "was once offered to *bear* the sins of many^b:" that the heavenly mercy-seat, of which that of the tabernacle was but a "pattern^c," might be accessible to the penitent sinner consistently with the Divine holiness: that God "might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth^d." The import of the Paschal ceremony was also the same, and the peculiar character of its victim gives additional force to the argument; the innocence of the Lamb being a suitable emblem of the Saviour's spotless purity, whereby He became an acceptable sacrifice to a holy God.

^a "For the life of the flesh *is* in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for the soul; *for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.*" Lev. xvii. 11.

^b Heb. ix. 28.

^c See Heb. viii. 5, also ix. 23.

^d Rom. iii. 26.

If it be objected that, in those cases where life had been forfeited, sacrifices were of no avail; let it be remembered, that this was the case of political offences. God was the *political* head, as well as the *moral* governor, of the Jewish nation: but it is only in this latter character that He is to be viewed with regard to the world in general; and, as such, He appears always to have allowed sacrifice to arrest the sentence of justice. It is also true, that atonement was sometimes permitted to be made without the shedding of blood; and, also, that animal sacrifices were enjoined in some cases where sin had not been committed, as upon recovery from sickness. But the former was only allowed, where the circumstances of the offender were inadequate to the expense of animal sacrifice⁷. As to the latter, it appears to have been a prevailing opinion among the Jews⁸, that bodily disease was the direct consequence of previous transgression; and the notion is countenanced by our Lord^a, who, in performing bodily cures, frequently connected them with forgiveness of sin. When, therefore, sickness is viewed as the testimony of the Divine displeasure against sin, there seems a peculiar suitableness in the appointment of sacrifice in this case, and an entire consistency with what is here insisted upon as the main object of the institution.

It has been said that, if God had intended vicarious atonement by Christ to be the chief object of the faith of His ancient people, He would have

⁷ See Lev. v. 6—11.

⁸ See John ix. 2.

^a Mark ii. 5, also John v. 14. See also 1 Cor. xi. 30.

announced it in plain terms. But this objection applies equally to the whole of that dispensation, in which the most important truths, and even rules of life, were rather shadowed forth by emblematic signs, than distinctly stated or expressly commanded. The important doctrine of a future state is nowhere expressly and pointedly revealed in the Old Testament; and even moral purity was enforced by the symbolical rites of circumcision, washings, and other purifications. Sensible objects being best calculated to impress upon the minds of men the spiritual declarations of God, He condescended to use a mode of instruction suited to the hardness of their hearts, and the darkness of their understandings. And, though the more spiritually-minded Israelites doubtless looked forward to a more durable inheritance, and a more efficacious sacrifice, than any earthly Canaan could afford, or animal victim effect; it was not till the dawn of Gospel day that "life and immortality were *brought to light*," that the precepts of moral rectitude were strictly enjoined, or the means of the sinner's justification distinctly announced. Indeed, if the obscurity incident to the rite of sacrifice be insisted on as a valid objection, the greatest part of the Old Testament must be given up, and the dark pages of prophecy no longer be considered as one of the main bulwarks of Christianity.

Amidst all the gloom, however, which shrouds the prophetic parts of Scripture, the real character of that great Sacrifice, which is the chief burden of their predictions, is manifested in the clearest light.

"He was brought," says the prophet Isaiah ^b,
"as a lamb to the slaughter."

"We thought Him *judicially* stricken."

"He was wounded *for our transgressions*."

"Jehovah hath made to *light upon Him the iniquity of us all*." "It was exacted, and *He was made answerable*."

Had we been told merely that He suffered for us, the vagueness of such an expression might have left room for doubt as to the precise meaning of the passage; but, if it can be said that the iniquity of the transgressor was made to *light upon Him*; and that, being Himself harmless and undefiled, He was *judicially* stricken, and also *made answerable* for the iniquity of *others*; and yet no *translation* of guilt be intended, and no *vicarious* atonement effected: then it follows, that language has no determinate signification, and that no doctrine can with any certainty be derived from the Oracles of Truth.

The gradual development of this essential principle of the plan of our redemption, affords no inconsiderable testimony to its truth. The great Author of Nature has appointed, that the discovery of all those sciences and arts most useful to man should be progressive. He has decreed, that the lily of the vale, the forest oak, and all the various tribes of animated nature, should pass from the germ of life to maturity through successive stages of advancing existence. By a process analogous to this, the vicarious principle of that great remedial

^b Chap. liii. Bp. Lowth's translation.

scheme for man's recovery was, at first, *dimly* recognized in the expiatory offerings of Abel and the patriarchs : was *more distinctly* communicated to the Israelite, in the ceremony of the great day of atonement : and, as the time for its full display in the opening of the Gospel dispensation drew nigh, it became the *express* burden of the Psalmist's song, and the Prophet's prediction. Accordingly, its further development in the New Testament continues to be progressive. Our Lord is first announced to the shepherds under the general term of a "Saviour^e;" and He is soon afterwards hailed by John as the "Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world^d." This latter expression seems to imply the doctrine here contended for ; because, though Christ may in one sense be said to take away sin by His example, and the sanctifying influence of His Spirit on the heart ; yet, as a lamb the peculiar emblem of *innocence*, as the antitype of the Paschal victim, He could take away the *guilt* of it only by giving Himself "to be slain," that His blood might be the price of our redemption.

But our Lord Himself afterwards, in speaking of His own work and ministry, uses terms which cannot be misunderstood. "The Son of man came to give His life a ransom for many (λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν) :"^e and this remarkable declaration is recorded by two of the Evangelists^e. Again, "the bread which I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world (ὑπὲρ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου ζωῆς)^f."

^e Luke ii. 11. ^d John i. 29. ^e Matt. xx. 28 ; and Mark x. 45.

^f John vi. 51.

And immediately before His crucifixion, when He instituted the Sacrament to be a standing memorial of His death, as if He had anticipated the fatal error of later times, He uses these emphatic words : "This is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins^s." If it be asked, why He did not recur to this important doctrine still more frequently ; His own words reply, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now^h."

But at His last solemn interview with the eleven disciples, when He "opened their understandings that they might understand the Scriptures¹," inasmuch as *they* were to be the witnesses of the truth to the Church in all ages, He then doubtless fully unfolded to them the nature of His office and ministry, and the precise import of His sufferings. Now it is remarkable, that upon this occasion, when referring to those parts of Scripture which concerned Himself, He includes the Law of Moses : but in the Law of Moses there appears to be nothing so pointedly applicable to the death of Christ as to justify this particular reference, except the Levitical sacrifices ; and the principle of these was, as we have seen in the ceremony of the scape-goat, *vicarious substitution*. *Such*, then, He meant them to understand was the nature of His own sacrifice, when He proceeds to say, that "*thus* it is written, and *thus* it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise

^s Matt. xxvi. 28.

^h John xvi. 12.

¹ Luke xxiv. 45.

from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins might be preached in His name among all nations." "And ye are witnesses of these things." Upon this authority then, from the mouth of Christ Himself, and with the further illumination of the "Spirit of truth," St. Peter thus speaks of Him: "Who His *own self bare* (ἀνῆνεγκεν) *our sins in His own body on the tree:*" and again, "Christ also hath once suffered for sins, *the just for the unjust*^k." Hence, also, the numerous passages in the other Epistles to the same effect. "God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, *condemned sin in the flesh*^l." "Ye are bought (ἡγοράσθητε) with a price^m." "He hath made Him *to be sin for us* who knew no sinⁿ." "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made *a curse for us*^o." "For it pleased *the Father* that in Him should all fulness dwell; and, having *made peace through the blood of His cross*, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself^p." "Who gave Himself a ransom for all (ἀντιλύτρον ὑπὲρ πάντων)^q." The meaning of these passages is obvious. The frequent use of the prepositions ἀντὶ and ὑπὲρ, the former of which especially seems always in its proper sense to imply *substitution*^r or equivalence, puts it beyond reasonable doubt, that the authors of them viewed the

^k 1 Pet. ii. 24, and iii. 18.

^l Rom. viii. 3.

^m 1 Cor. vi. 20.

ⁿ 2 Cor. v. 21.

^o Gal. iii. 13.

^p Col. i. 19, 20.

^q 1 Tim. ii. 6.

^r As to the vicarious import of ἀντὶ and ὑπὲρ, see Raphelius as quoted by Dr. Magee, vol. i. p. 251.

death of Christ as an equivalent for the penalty of sin: and when that death is also asserted to be the *price* for which our redemption is bought, the same idea is, if possible, still more forcibly impressed upon the mind. When, therefore, our Lord tells His disciples that He came to "give His life *a ransom* for many," He must have meant them to understand that He came, not so much to communicate new light on the subject of religion—not so much to set them an example of perfect obedience by His life, and by His death to attest the truth of His mission—but, rather, that He might offer Himself in the sinner's *stead*, a *vicarious* satisfaction to the offended justice of God.

Our Saviour had, while on earth, announced His own perfect divinity and perfect humanity—that He was "equal with God," and yet "the Son of man." The Epistles confirm the same truth, and declare the purpose of this union to be, that He "should taste death for every man*." Now, it is inconceivable that the Most High should have submitted to this, except that He might, by so doing, endure in man's stead that death which is "the wages of sin." Such a supposition would be contrary to the acknowledged and invariable rule of His providence, in exactly adapting means to ends, but never employing a superabundance of means, or exerting a needless energy. And for any purpose short of actual substitution for sin,

* Heb. ii. 9.

a less effort of Almighty power than must have been put forth in taking humanity into Godhead, and a less valuable sacrifice than the sacrifice of Deity, would have been sufficient.

In reference to the Epistle to the Hebrews it should be remembered, that the Apostle knew he was addressing himself to *Jews*, who were of course familiar with the ritual of the Levitical Law. When, therefore, he tells them that Christ "offered one sacrifice for sins[†]," since these words would naturally be associated in their minds with what is said of the offerings of the Law, and particularly of that most important one on the great day of Atonement, when the sins of the people were *transferred* to the victim; it must have been his intention to impress it upon their minds, that the sacrifice of Christ was of the same *vicarious* character. Accordingly, he tells them again that He "was once offered to bear (*ἀντὶ ἡμῶν*) the sins of many[‡]." These words are decisive: for how can it be said, that He, who was Himself sinless, *bears sin*, and yet be denied that He was a *substitute for the sinner*? Also, in the latter part of the verse, "to them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation:" since it cannot here be meant, that at His first coming He was liable to the imputation of sin *in His own person*, the expression can only signify that He then *stood in the place of the sinner*. Again, why is the Apostle, in drawing a parallel between the Levi-

[†] Heb. x. 12.

[‡] Heb. ix. 28.

tical sacrifices and that of Christ, so careful to point out the superior efficacy of the latter? but to teach us that, in forming a right estimate of the satisfaction due to Divine justice for sin, regard must be had to the *value* of the victim. In a word, we are "bought with a price," and that price must be an *equivalent*.

The Christian, therefore, who professes to submit implicitly to the authority of Scripture, must allow the doctrine of redemption, by the vicarious Atonement of Christ, to be the truth of God. If, moreover, that truth is impressed upon his heart as well as his understanding by the Divine Spirit, it will be to him no longer a subject of barren speculation; but it will be the mainspring of his grateful obedience, and the high theme of his adoration. It will be his delight, while yet a sojourner on earth, to anticipate the future song of the redeemed in heaven, who, as we learn from the book which closes the volume of inspiration, with one voice ascribe their salvation to the Lamb that was slain, and had redeemed (*ἡγόρασας*) them to God by His blood ².

The peculiar adaptation of this glorious doctrine to meet the moral wants of mankind, has been already noticed. But, the more we reflect upon the natural tendency of that august display of Divine love and holiness which it exhibits, to awaken corresponding feelings of love and gratitude in man's breast, and to urge him to the attainment of every virtue, the more striking does that adaptation ap-

² Rev. v. 9.

pear⁷. It is an undeniable fact, that the mere statement of the abstract truths of morality possesses comparatively little power to influence our conduct. Men had been warned of the evil and danger of sin, by precept upon precept, and by the testimony of their own consciences, and to a certain extent believed it; but yet no practical amendment followed. The arguments of reason, and the manifestation of the Divine perfections in the works of creation and providence, had been alike disregarded; it became, therefore, necessary that a stronger appeal should be made to the understanding and the feelings. He who gave the warning must *demonstrate* the danger of sin, by exhibiting *Himself* as a sufferer under its consequences. The obvious effect of this palpable argument must be, to produce such a reformation of moral character as no mere exhortations or threatenings could achieve. Others may hesitate, and too many, alas, do hesitate, to admit the certainty of the intrinsic malignity, and final condemnation of sin; but they who believe that Christ has already suffered as the sinner's substitute, perceive at once its danger and lamentable consequences; because "nothing," as a learned Prelate well observes, "can make so certain the punishment which sin, if indulged, will hereafter incur, as the punishment it has actually incurred⁸."

It is thus that the faith of the Gospel, when

⁷ Christ "gave Himself for us, that He might *redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*" Tit. ii. 14.

⁸ Sumner, J. B., *Evidences of Christianity*, p. 285.

rightly understood, tends to produce that revolution in the mind and character—that “death unto sin, and new birth unto righteousness”—which always accompanies true conversion, and which rests satisfied with no attainment short of perfect holiness. It seems to be “a law of our moral constitution, that the foundation of our confidence becomes necessarily the mould of our characters*.” A dependence, therefore, upon our own obedience, which, however sincere, must still be imperfect, will have a tendency to make us satisfied with something short of sinless perfection: the standard of duty is thus lowered, and the glory of Christianity obscured. But he who relies exclusively upon the *perfect* righteousness, wrought out by the atoning sacrifice of Christ suffering in the sinner’s stead, by constantly contemplating the holiness of God as exhibited therein, naturally becomes dissatisfied with anything short of corresponding holiness, and is thus gradually formed into the Divine image, and powerfully instigated to “purify himself, even as He is pure.”

Humility also, the soil most congenial to virtue, must be the result of an acquiescence in that unequivocal judgment passed upon us, when the Son of God was condemned as the representative of our race; and the idea of merit on our part is totally excluded, when we are indebted for our all to the merit of another. This is, indeed, the

* See Erskine on the Internal Evidence of Revealed Religion, p. 114.

secret of that unfavourable reception, which the doctrine of the Atonement has ever met with in the world. It strikes at the root of all human pride, and therefore the self-sufficiency of man rejects it. But it will ever be the glory of Christianity, that its saving truths are revealed to the sincere and humble enquirer, while they are hid from those who refuse to submit their finite understandings to the dictates of Omniscience.

Let it not be supposed, that the sanctifying tendency thus attributed to the doctrine of the Atonement can, in any degree, supersede the necessity of the Holy Spirit's influence, which is so indispensable to human salvation. That a saving belief even in this very doctrine, as well as in every other truth of religion, is invariably the work of the Holy Spirit, and of the Holy Spirit alone, is most true. But then it is through the medium of the doctrines of Scripture, and the natural feelings of the heart, that *He* works. Our Lord Himself thus speaks to His followers of the Spirit's work, "He shall *take of Mine* and shall shew *it* unto you^b." His influence, therefore, rather confirms the relation of cause and effect, which naturally subsists between this and other leading truths taught in the Bible, and that moral character which the Bible recommends.

Thus the vicarious Atonement of Christ is the foundation, and the corner-stone, of the whole work of man's redemption, which the Father's

^b John xvi. 15.

love devised, and which the Holy Spirit begins, carries forward, and completes. Man is rescued from the curse of sin, renewed in holiness after the image of Him that created him; and, finally, "sealed" by the Spirit "unto the day of Redemption."

